



UNIVERSITY OF CENTRAL ARKANSAS BEARS

LOCATION.....	CONWAY, AR
LAST SEASON.....	5-4 (.556)
CONFERENCE (SOUTHLAND).....	(0-0)
COLORS.....	Purple & Gray
HOMEFIELD.....	Estes Stadium (12,000 capacity) Colored Field Turf
HEAD COACH.....	Nathan Brown (UCA '09)
RECORD AT SCHOOL.....	20-13
CAREER RECORD.....	20-13
ASSISTANTS:	
Brooks Hollingsworth (Assistant HC/ TE) (UCA '81) 22nd year	
Ken Collums (Off Coordinator/ QB) (UCA '95) 8 th Year (Played QB 91-94 for Bears)	
Mike Kitchens (Def Coordinator/ LB) (Ark Tech '09) First Year (Coaches safeties at UCA 15-17)	
Gunnar Boykin (Off Line/ Recruiting) (S. Miss '08) 4 th Year	
Tony Davis (Def Line) (Troy) 3rd Year	
Ryan Howard (WR/ Sp Teams Coord) (UCA '14) 5 th Year/ Played QB @ UCA 12-14	
Chaz Scales (Def Backs)	
Nelson Gunnell (Running Backs)	
Tayler Palk (OLB)	
Kristen Trammell (Asst Def Backs)	
TEAM WINS (LAST 5 YRS)...	10-10-6-9-5 (40-18)
2019 FINISH.....	(9-4, 7-2)
Key Wins: WKU (35-28), SHSU (29-25)	
Lost 2nd Round of FCS Playoffs (Illinois St 24-14)	

COACH AND PROGRAM Nathan Brown was named the 20th head coach of University of Central Arkansas football in December 2017, replacing Coach Steve Campbell, who left for a position with South Alabama Jaguars (He has since be fired). Brown was the Offensive Coordinator under Coach Campbell. Brown has spent his career at UCA, and his hire was a great move by the university. He knows the program, he knows the coaching staff, and he knows the players. Brown will be in his fourth season for the Bears and holds a record of 20-13. His first season saw the Bears drop to 6-5 after back-to-back 10-win seasons. A tough loss to Lamar, who made the FCS Playoffs, at home and an overtime loss to Sam Houston State University on the road could have been the difference in a great season vs just a successful season. In 2019, the Bears finished 9-4 with an FBS win over Western Kentucky and an FCS Playoff appearance showed UCA had made a step in the right direction with Brown. Then in 2020, UCA Athletic Director Brad Teague announced the Bears would play a fall football schedule despite the Southland's postponement of football until the spring of 2021. This move saw the Bears play a reduced game schedule but finished 5-4, and their losses came against two FBS programs (UAB, Arkansas State) and FCS power North Dakota State. They also split with Eastern Kentucky, who they become conference rivals within the ASUN. During his years as quarterbacks coach at UCA, the Bears' quarterbacks averaged 3,211 passing yards per season, eclipsing the 3,000-yard yard plateau six times, for a total of 25,691 yards. With

Coaching Bio: Nathan	
Central Arkansas (2018–present)	
Head Coach	
*2020 Fall Southland Conference Coach of the Year	
Central Arkansas (2014–2017)	
Offensive coordinator & quarterbacks coach	
Central Arkansas (2009–2013)	

Brown as the Bears' offensive coordinator, UCA had 17 All-SLC offensive first or second-team selections, including a Freshman, Player, and two Offensive Linemen of the Year selections. The Bears ranked in the Top 10 in FCS, scoring three times in four years, and ranked seventh in the country in total offense in 2017. Equally

as impressive as his coaching credentials are his numbers from his playing days at UCA. Brown was a three-time All-American who

threw for 10,558 yards and 100 touchdowns in his career, both records for a collegiate quarterback in the state of Arkansas. The Bears went 30-10 with Brown as the starting quarterback. He was the SLC Offensive Player of the Year in 2007 and the SLC Player of the Year in 2008 when he was also a Walter Payton Award finalist. Brown also owns school records for touchdown passes in a game (7) and most yards of total offense (490). Before UCA moved to Division I in 2006, Brown was named the Gulf South Conference Freshman of the year in 2005.

The Bears had tremendous success at the NAIA level from 1979-1992 as a member of the Arkansas Intercollegiate Conference. UCA won 13 of 14 conference championships during that timeframe and a staple in the NAIA Top 20. In 1993, UCA moved into NCAA D-II Gulf South Conference. In 2007, UCA moved to D-I and joined the Southland Conference. The Bears made the D-II playoffs in 2011, 2012, 2016, 2017, and 2019.

D-I FCS PLAYOFF HISTORY

Year	Round	Opponent	Result
2011	First Round Second Round	Tennessee Tech Montana	W 34-14 L 14-41
2012	Second Round	Georgia Southern	L 16-24
2016	First Round Second Round	Illinois State Eastern Washington	W 31-24 L 14-31
2017	Second Round	New Hampshire	L 15-21
2019	Second Round	Illinois State	L 14-24

Central Arkansas has developed a rivalry with McNeese State called the **Red Beans and Rice Bowl**. The Bears hold a 7-6 series advantage. However, the Bears leaving the Southland may end the rivalry, as they are not scheduled to play in 2021.

After 15 years in the Southland Conference, the Bears will be playing in the alliance between the ASUN and the WAC, known as the ASUN-WAC Challenge for 2021. The seven teams, including UCA, will be known as the AQ7 teams. The alliance allows both conferences to merge for one season and have an automatic qualifier for the 2021 FCS Playoffs. After the 2021 season, the ASUN and WAC will divide into their own football conferences.

QUARTERBACKS

Coach Brown called QB **#3 Breylin Smith** the glue that holds his team together and is known for his calming demeanor. He has had to overcome much adversity, including battling injuries and losing his mother, a former UCA volleyball player, at five years old. Smith is a 6'3" 210 QB from Conway, Arkansas, and committed to UCA his senior year of high school. He was named 2019 first-team FCS All-American by Hero Sports, set the UCA single-season school record with 3,604 yards, and tied the school record with 32 touchdown passes. During the fall 2020 spring season, Smith led the Bears with completing 56.1% of his passes and tallied 19 TD passes but did have ten interceptions.

Breylin graduated in May 2020 and received an extra COVID year of eligibility, and will be the Bear QB to start the season under center.

The backup job will be between redshirt-freshman **#17 Darius Bowers** and true freshman **#11 Hunter Loyd**. Bowers had several D-I offers, including an invitation to walk-on at Arkansas, but he took the full scholarship from UCA. Bowers is another big QB standing 6'2 and 185 lbs. He did not play in the 2019 or 2020 seasons. His

Fayetteville HS coach, Billy Dawson, said the Bears are getting a true standout student-athlete in Bowers, who threw for 2,991 yards as a senior with 27 touchdowns and only two interceptions.

"UCA hit the jackpot with this guy," Dawson said. "Darius is exactly what you look for from a leadership position such as quarterback. He is a true warrior and exemplifies what a Fayetteville Bulldog is both on the field and in the classroom, a tremendous young man of character and work. I'm proud to have been part of his journey."

Bowers missed three games with a knee injury while leading Fayetteville to a 36-35 victory at Bryant in September. However, Bowers returned to finish the season for the Bulldogs.

Loyd, a 6'3" 200 lbs dual-threat QB from Rogers HS, signed his letter of intent to play in Conway, AR in February 2020 after de-committing from Missouri State. He will leave Rogers HS as the all-time leading passer, throwing for more than 7,000 yards and 70 touchdowns. Loyd also had offers from Arkansas State, UL-Monroe, Cornell, and Missouri State. Hunter played for his father, Mike, at Rogers HS, who announced his 40-year football career ended as he retired in December 2020.

RUNNING BACKS

The Bears' offense will have to replace their leading rusher from 2020, Kierre Crossley, who entered the NCAA transfer portal with one season of eligibility and landed at the University of Arkansas Pine-Bluff (SWAC). A host of running backs are waiting in the wings, but all are underclassman. **#28 Cameron Myers** (So), **#20 Marshun Douglas** (r-Fr), and **#35 Corbin Humphrey** (So) all had limited carries last season. A Plant City, Florida native, Myers carried the ball 66 times for 648 yards and a TD. He also served as a kick returner where he had most of his success averaging 29.5 yards per return, which ranked 3rd in the nation in the FCS and had a 96-yard touchdown on the opening kickoff vs. Eastern Kentucky on November 14, 2020. Myers also caught 12 passes for the Bears offense.

Douglas (Memphis, TN) saw spot carries in 2020, with 20 carries for 129 yards and 2 TD on the ground and one passing the football to WR Lajuan Winnigham for 31 yards off a Halfback pass. He had offers from Tulsa, Missouri State, Southeast Missouri, Tennessee State, and UT Martin.

The running back corp for UCA is young and talented. Freshman **Trysten Smith** brings big numbers into the Bears offense from his high school days and could be a breakout player if he gets playing time.

Additional RB:

#23 Trysten Smith – Fr – 5'9" 203 lbs, Duncanville (Tx) HS: 2019 1787 yards 25 TDs. Offers from Army, Grambling State, Houston Baptist, Kansas, UTSA, and Liberty.

#27 Derrick Wise – Fr – 5'10" 182 lbs, Northside (Ar) HS: 2019 (2 games played) 30 carries 138 yards. Played QB as well, 16-22, 281 yards, 1 TD, 1 Int.

#29 Cameron Coleman - Jr

#30 Michael George - So

WIDE RECEIVERS/ TIGHT ENDS

#1 Tyler Hudson was a big target (6'2" 175 lbs) and a superstar for UCA in 2020. He led the team in catches with 50 and averaged 16.9 yards per catch and averaged 93.9 yards per game. Hudson found the end zone seven times in 2020 and was the workhorse. On punt returns, Hudson was a legit threat averaging 7.9 yards per return and a TD. Hudson had offers from Rice, Cornell, and Texas Southern but chose Central Arkansas,

which has paid off as a premier WR. **#5 Lajuan Winningham** was another talented athlete that had a good 2020 season. He caught 37 passes and 12 TD, which led the team and the FCS. Winningham averaged 14.1 yards per catch and 58 yards per game. Winningham was named a "Diamond in the Rough" by Draft Diamonds, who ranked him a 2023 NFL Draft prospect. He has the size, speed, and athleticism to be an NFL receiver, and additional experience will only help his stock. **#87 Mitchell Perkinson**, a transfer from Oklahoma State, was the third most used WR used by UCA with 17 catches in 2020. Perkinson is 5'10" and was instrumental in the win vs. Missouri State as he had four catches for 68 yards, including a 20-yard reception on the final drive that converted a third down. Finally, another transfer receiver for the Bears is **#8 Tobias Enlow**. Enlow signed with Arkansas and transferred to UCA in 2019. Enlow is a senior who recorded 12 catches for 119 yards in 2020. **#2 Jarrod Barnes** is a 5'11" receiver that came to the Bears through the University of Arkansas. Barnes, a 4-star recruit, only played in one game as a Razorback his freshman season. He was rated as the #1 prospect in Arkansas and was named the Arkansas Prep Male Athlete of the Year. Barnes has an impressive list of offers, including Ole Miss, Auburn, Missouri, Memphis, Iowa State, Louisville, and others. "Jarrod will be one of the most decorated transfers we have had here at UCA," said Brown in 2018 when Barnes transferred. "He brings unbelievable play-making ability at the wide receiver position for us. Not only is he great with the ball in his hand, but he also has breakaway speed to go score from anywhere. We had an immediate need at this spot and Jarrod is going to help bridge that gap as soon as he steps on campus in January. "He is a local kid that understands what we are about and who we are as a program. One great thing about Jarrod is he will have three years of eligibility left. I can also see him helping us in the return game as well."

As far as Tight Ends go, UCA has a roster full of big talented and versatile athletes. They list ten TE on their 2021 roster (pre-camp). They return four Tight Ends with varying amounts of playing time and experience. **#47 Austin Eldridge** appeared in 9 games and had 6 catches and a TD in 2020. Eldridge is a junior with good size at 6'4" 245lbs. Again, the roster is full of TE of similar size. Senior **#85 Jack Short** has received accolades as a potential NFL prospect. He was named 2020 preseason second-team ALL-Southland Conference selection but only appeared in 4 games in 2020. He is returning for the 2021 season and could be a real force on the UCA offense and help develop the young tight ends on the roster.

OFFENSIVE LINE

2021 Central Arkansas Stats

Rushing Off.....	114.0
Passing Off.....	248.6
Total Off.....	362.6
Scoring Off.....	32.3
Third Down Off.....	34%
Third Down Def.....	35%
Red Zone Off.....	27/31 (87%)
Red Zone TD.....	61%
Scoring Def.....	29.0
Net Punting.....	37.2
Punt Returns.....	11.0
Kickoff Ret.....	23.8
Rushing Def.....	162.9
Passing Def.....	224.7
Total Def.....	387.6
Red Zone Def.....	32/36 (89%)

The Bears are fortunate to return First-Team Preseason All-Southland Conference (Phil Steele) Center **#63 Toby Sanderson**, a 6'2" 300lbs senior from Oklahoma. Sanderson came to Central Arkansas as a preferred walk-on and received a scholarship after stepping in the center role after a season. He started all 13 games in 2019. He joins a returning group of O-linemen, including **#73 Parker Ray** (6'4" 310lbs), who missed last season with an injury. Also returning is starters LT **#62 Cameron Web**, LG **#78 Jaylin Hendrix**, RG **#61 Sanderson Hines**, RT **#79 Justin Lairy**, and **#62 Cameron Webb**, who played several different positions on the line. The experience and depth of the O-Line are very good, and with a full complement of tight ends returning, getting to the quarterback will be no easy task for the opponents in 2021. Comparing stats to other teams in 2020 is unfair for UCA, as they played nine games versus others who played less. However, in 2020, the Bears O-line allowed 20 sacks over nine games, which would have been near the top of the FCS in that category. Fellow AQ7 teams Stephen F. Austin

and Eastern Kentucky also have stingy offensive lines that make the conference one of the best in the nation for offensive linemen.

KICKERS

Kicker **#53 Hayden Ray** is scheduled to return after scoring 60 points and going 12-for-16 (.750) in field goals and 24-of-25 PATs. Ray hit 6-of-8 FG from the 40-49 yard range, and his longest FG was 47 yards. Ray is a consistent kicker, and Coach Brown is happy to have him return. Ray's best game was vs. Missouri State when he went 5-for-5 with three FG beyond 40 yards. He was named second-team preseason All-Southland Conference in 2020. Ray has made 77 of 79 career PATs and 29 of 34 career FGs and has scored 164 career points.

DEFENSIVE LINE

#91 Logan Jesup exploded on the FCS scene in 2020 after not playing a down in 2019 and only having one game under his belt in 2018. Jesup had six solo sacks in eight games last fall, 37 tackles, tops for D-linemen, and led the team with 11 tackles-for-loss (TFL). Playing on the edge, Jesup explodes off the line and has great instincts. He plays big and disrupts offenses by applying pressure and batting down passes at the line. **#8 Jalen Bedell** (formerly #55) was another beast on the line for the Bears. Bedell had 20 tackles, 6.5 TFL, and led the team with 5.5 sacks starting all nine games. Bedell showed up in big in-game situations causing two forced fumbles, and his quick and aggressive play led to two QB hurries.

Coming off the edge for the Bears is **#0 J.W. Jones** (formerly #50). Jones also started all nine games in fall 2020 and had 35 tackles, 6.0 TFL, and 3.5 sacks. Jones has developed into a player to watch for opponent offensive coordinators. He, along with the other members of the defensive line for UCA, made them one of the best in the FCS in many categories, including third-down stops (.348), yards per play (5.28), and held opponents to 29.0 points per game (PPG). Add in **#90 A'Jarvius Brown, #97 Caden Brown, #96 Jeremiah Gray, #49 Azuka Mgbemena, and #98 Jimani Gibson**; the Bears have another position that has great experience and depth to make a deep playoff run if they can find a way in with the AQ bid or an At-large selection.

LINEBACKERS

Two studs return to the linebacking corp for UCA, **#45 Dre Matthews** and **#15 T.J. Campbell**. Matthews and Campbell led the team in tackles for the LB position with 43 and 41 tackles, respectively. Both started all nine games, and Matthews dominated matchups with 5 TFL. Campbell, a 2020 All-SLC preseason team and 2020 Phil Steele All-SLC preseason team, caused chaos with 7 TFL and 2.5 sacks. Campbell now has 25 games under his belt with 22 starts. He and Matthews are leading the way for the middle of the defense for the Bears. **#24 Darin Davenport** had a great 2020 season after starting 13 games in 2019 as a freshman. Davenport played eight games last fall and had 31 tackles, 5 TFL, two sacks, and three forced fumbles. He is a young talented player that now has the experience that makes him a more dangerous player. **#18 Malik Wilson** started seven games for the Bears and had 13 tackles and an interception. Wilson returns as a junior to bring more experience to the linebacking group.

DEFENSIVE BACKS

The defensive backs for the Bears is another unit that returns excellent experience and talent, despite losing All-American Robert Rochell, whom Los Angeles Rams drafted in the 4th round of the 2021 NFL Draft. **#4 Cameron Godfrey** is a dynamic player that led the Bears in tackles with 51 and tied in interceptions (2). **#3 Deandre Lamont** (previously #33) was another fierce payer in the secondary for UCA. He finished 2020 with 39 tackles and matched Godfrey with 2 INTs over eight games. **#7 Nick Nakwaasah** started eight games and had

33 tackles and an INT. Nakwaasah was a 3-star recruit out of Dallas, TX has a huge ceiling and can be another trouble-maker among the Bears' DB talent. Add in **#5 Tamuarion Wilson**, a freshman who played nine games in the fall, made 31 tackles, and had a pick return of 28 yards. Wilson also forced a fumble that led to a defensive touchdown vs. Missouri Western.

PUNTERS

#44 Seren Hughes-Ford handled the punting duties for UCA in the fall of 2020. Hughes-Ford spent his freshman season with Colorado Buffaloes before transferring to Coffeyville CC. In the fall, Hughes-Ford's average punt went 39.2 yards, and he had a long of 63 yards and put 12 punts inside the 20. However, that was not all he did. He also served as the backup FG kicker in the crazy COVID-season, going 1-for-1 on FG (30) and 4-for-4 on PATs. Hughes-Ford was also called upon to execute an onside kick, which he did to perfection, allowing UCA's Corbin Humphrey to recover it. Having a solid punter that is versatile is a great asset for the Bears and head coach Nathan Brown.

SPECIAL TEAMS

Running back **#28 Cameron Myers** handled most of the kickoff returns in 2020. His 13 returns netted 384 yards (7th nationally) and a 29.5 (3rd nationally) return average. Myers led all kick returners who played a full complement of games in 2020 and had a 96-yard touchdown return on the opening kickoff vs. Eastern Kentucky. #6 Christian Richmond also fielded kicks for the Bears and averaged 28.8 yards per return.

Wide receiver **#1 Tyler Hudson** was called on for punt return duties. He fielded 15 punts for 119 yards and had a 7.9 return average. He did return one punt for a touchdown in 2020.

RECRUITING CLASS

The University of Central Arkansas added 21 new players to the program through the recruiting process. Three of the recruits are mid-year enrollees and 18 high school players. Coach Brown focused on the talent in Arkansas and pulled eight recruits from the Bear State. Additionally, six players arrive from Texas, three from Mississippi, two from Alabama, and one from Tennessee and Florida. The offense was a huge focus as five WR signed and three TE, two running backs, two offensive linemen, and one QB were brought into the program. The Bears will have four new DBs, three DL, and one LB to develop on the defensive side.

Learn more about the UCA 2021 recruiting class here:

<https://ucasports.com/news/2021/2/3/football-bears-add-21-on-national-signing-day.aspx>

QUESTIONS/ ANSWERS

The big questions for the University of Central Arkansas football program may not be within their control. First, the Bears left the Southland Conference for the one-year alliance with the ASUN and WAC, which throws the Bears right back into a conference with Sam Houston State, the reigning FCS Champion. The ASUN-WAC Challenge will receive one automatic bid. The competition for the AQ bid will be fierce between SHSU, Jacksonville State, and UCA. At-large bids are also likely with these three powerhouse programs. Can UCA do

2021 Football Schedule

Sept 4	@ Arkansas State
Sept 11	@ Missouri State
Sept 18	vs. UAPB
Sept 25	vs. Sam Houston St.
Oct 2	@ Abilene Christian
Oct 16	vs. Eastern Kentucky
Oct 23	@ Lamar
Oct 30	@ Jacksonville State
Nov 6	vs. Texas Wesleyan
Nov 13	vs Stephen F. Austin
Nov 20	@ Tarleton State

what they need to do in order to stand out among the AQ7 teams? The Bears have a demanding schedule in 2021, including a stretch of eight games to start the season. They open two road games (Arkansas State, Missouri State) before coming home to face SWAC Western Division Champion UAPB and then host SHSU at home on September 25. There will be no rest for the Central Arkansas Bears in reference to their schedule.

GRADES

Offense

B

The Bears' offense is loaded with talent and experience. This could be an outstanding year for UCA's offense. Their QB depth is questionable, and if Breylin Smith has any issues, the Bears would be looking at two talented but young and inexperienced QBs. The Bears must find a way to convert more third downs, as in 2020, they only converted 35%, which was in the bottom half of the FCS rankings.

Special Teams

B+

FG Kicker Hayden Ray is a solid special teams player, and there is a lot of confidence in his leg. Punter Seren Hughes-Ford proved his worth with his versatility. **#59 Chandler Caughron** handles kickoffs and is the placeholder on FG/PAT.

The return game for the Bears is solid with Cameron Myers and Tyler Hudson. Both are very athletic and have explosive speed.

Defense

A

From D-Line, linebackers, and the secondary, there are not many glaring holes in the UCA defense. This Bear squad is going to be tough on opponents, but fun to watch for football fans.

Intangibles

C+

The ASUN-WAC Challenge instantly became one of the strongest conferences in FCS Football. Central Arkansas has to find ways to start fast and finish each game strong. That is no easy task, as their schedule is brutal, and they play a lot of road games the first half of the season. Circle October 30, when UCA travels to Jacksonville State. This game could separate UCA from other FCS teams.

A very spirited and passionate fan base lifts the Bears' intangibles. A great stadium atmosphere and one of the most notorious fields in the nation make UCA's Estes Stadium a fun place to play. Stadium upgrades over the years and a home record of 43-11(79.6 Win Percentage @ Home) since 2011 when "The Stipes" were installed, including a 3-0 campaign in 2020 help the program as well. The Bears averaged nearly 8,000 fans in attendance in 2019, which above average for FCS programs. But, UCA had as many as 11,000+ in games in Estes Stadium at the beginning of the season. Attendance fell off as the season progressed. A home thumping at the hands of Southeastern Louisiana 34-0 in early November probably hurt the numbers in the remaining two home games.

Only playing only a fall schedule could prove valuable for a well-rested and hungry Bears squad. A young fiery coaching staff and a talented roster of athletes make UCA a contender.

Overall

B+